

On the Souls of humanity, or, seriously Do Not Touch.

OC OC

Inside an interrogation chamber, deep within one of the great war machines of the Zzyth fleet, a single human sat tied to a chair.

He was bare chested, and the Interrogator could see the scars that lined every inch of his body. These faint white lines were crossed and covered by more recent wounds. Cuts, bruises and burns inflicted by the Interrogator's own hand.

The Interrogator had long since sacrificed his own name to the Zzyth god of torture and war, in return he had been granted insight into the minds of those around him, so long as he inflicted enough pain upon them. The human was now ready, his mind and soul open to the Interrogator. The Interrogator's superiors wished to know what gifts the Pantheon of Humanity granted its soldiers, what rites were demanded of them and how to counteract them.

The Interrogator stepped in front of the human, careful to make his steps ring ominously upon the metal floor. He leaned close to the human's face and smiled as the human forced a single eye open while the other remained shut due to the swelling. The Interrogator raised a single long finger to his lipless mouth and smiled, an expression he knew to be as unnerving as a snarl.

Of course, the human couldn't speak even if he wished, as his mouth was gagged, now was not the time for the glorious song of his screams to ring out. The Interrogator needed to concentrate...

The Interrogator reached out with his mind, feeling towards the connections wrought in the soul of his victim from the pain inflicted. He found the human's soul easily, it veritably glowed with power. This was a powerfully gifted soldier indeed, The Interrogator thought, the glow of his soul rivaled that of the commander of this great vessel.

The human stiffened as he felt the tendrils of The Interrogator's power driving deeper and deeper into his soul. The Interrogator began to see his thoughts, and let the experience wash into him, this would be the first route into the depths of the human's soul.

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Crewman Jacobson had been warned during his training that some of the Zzyth torturers were telepaths. Telepathy was rare enough among the Terran military forces that he had not been able to attend the resistance training even though he had volunteered for it. Instead he had to rely solely upon the theoretical training he had been given

-The Interrogator felt himself pull out of the human's mind slightly at the strange thought. Voluntarily subjecting oneself to telepathic invasion? Not even the most bloodthirsty or fanatical members of the Zzyth Pantheon demanded such a sacrifice, telepathic invasion was dangerous to the victim, it could often lead to lifelong impairment of the mind and body. The gods of Humanity must be vile indeed, The Interrogator let the thoughts of the human flow over him once more-

Jacobson thought back to the lecture he had attended in the academy, a balding man in a hoverchair had spoken in depth about his experience with a telepath. "No matter how strong you are mentally, a telepath is gonna get in your head somehow." The man had said "Most human telepaths are adherents of Gaia" -*The Interrogator made a mental note of the name, before allowing the thoughts to wash over him again-* "But there are a fair number of mutants who possess the ability. Not to mention the Zzyth, there seem to be a larger number of telepaths among them than among humanity, leading us to think they have either bred selectively for the trait, or their Pantheon is freer with the gift than Gaia is..."

-The Interrogator held the thoughts in place, freezing the human's mind. He reached over to the table nearby and scribbled a note, "The first Name of Deity found in the subject's mind was Gaia. The domain and nature of this Deity is as yet unknown, it is not yet clear if this Gaia is the name of a particular god or the human name for their own Pantheon, further study will be required. Notably, the humans do not seem to have a large number of telepaths. This Gaia seems to hold the gift in reserve for the devout. Additionally, as a species it seems that genetic mutation is common, possibly even accepted, among the species. This may indicate a fleshcrafter Deity holds primary sway over their Pantheon, I shall delve deeper to see if this human's mind holds more answers." The Interrogator let the human's mind flow forward, nudging slightly in the direction of this Gaia-

Jacobson wasn't particularly devout in worship of Gaia -*what?*- his mother would have been mortified to see how rarely he attended services anymore. But he hardly had time for worship, especially with the war and everything. He promised himself that he would go back to attending temple if he got out of this. He knew that Gaia wasn't particularly fond of war, especially among her children, but he also knew that she understood the necessity with the Zzyth threatening all of humanity...

-The Interrogator once again froze the human's mind and leaned away, disturbed. This human had a soul as powerful as the most devout and yet he rarely attended to any worship whatsoever? The Interrogator made another note. "This human's mind holds very little devotion to this Gaia, but I have been unable to locate any other Name of Deity despite turning the subject's mind toward worship in general. Perhaps the Pantheon of Humanity hides itself from the knowledge of captured soldiers to keep the Pantheon of Zzyth from discovering their identities and weaknesses. Still, such an expungement should have weakened the Gifts this soldier has received and left obvious holes in his mind. I shall need to delve deeper, into the fabric of his soul to find the scars. May Holy Qreth guide me.-

Jacobson felt the attention of the Interrogator return. Those blips were strange and uncomfortable, but he recognized brainfreeze from the lectures. Instead of following along Jacobson's train of thought again, The Interrogator pushed down beneath. It felt to Jacobson like hot knives digging into every inch of him, pushing deeper and deeper until they were cutting into something beyond his body. Jacobson understood instinctively that the Interrogator was digging into his very soul. He writhed and screamed into his gag, but was unable to do anything more than endure as The Interrogator tore him apart.

-The Interrogator held the essence of the human's soul before him. He could see no scars upon it, indeed, it did not even have the patchwork appearance of one who has beheld Deity and had power injected into them. The Interrogator's own soul had a

great scar running down the center, bisecting him, where his name had been held. The Interrogator turned the human's soul over before him, disbelieving. No one could have a soul so bright and powerful without being rebuilt by Deity. Experimentally, The Interrogator tried to excise a small piece of the human's soul to examine its composition. He reached out to cut the soul, but found it resisted far more than he would have expected, he pressed harder, attempting to tear a chunk of the soul off, but found the soul entirely immutable. The Interrogator could examine it, even peer into it, but he could not alter it no matter how hard he pressed. The Interrogator was baffled, not even the strongest Zzyth soul would have completely rebuffed his greatest efforts. Frustrated, the Interrogator peered as deeply as he could into this inexplicable soul. There was something there, something he had not seen before, some seed of power-

The Interrogator found himself standing in a small clearing in a dense forest. Yellow sunlight fell around him, some avian creatures sang in the distance. The Interrogator saw a human female standing in the middle of the clearing. She was perhaps a head shorter than the human the Interrogator had just been examining, with golden hair that fell to the middle of her back. The Interrogator stepped forward cautiously, this experience was reminiscent of when The Interrogator had sacrificed his name to Qreth... but no Zzyth Deity would take the form of a human. As The Interrogator got closer to this mysterious human he could see eternity in her eyes, and he knew this was no mortal, this was a member of the Human Pantheon. Somehow, the human was linked directly to the very essence of Human Deity. The Interrogator tried to take a step back, but found himself bound by vines that had wrapped around his limbs.

The Deity stepped forward towards The Interrogator, a look of deep sorrow on her face. "I am **Gaia**" The Interrogator felt the power in the name as she spoke it. "You are a child of Qreth of the Zzyth Pantheon" she continued, walking slowly around him "Your Pantheon has declared me and my children Anathema and now seeks our utter destruction" The Interrogator could not even move to speak, but he felt her see the confirmation in his mind. The Interrogator had been present when the High Prophet had received the vision from the entire Pantheon igniting the holy war against the humans.

Gaia stepped up in front of The Interrogator, fixing him with her eternal gaze. "I despise war" she said sadly "I am **The Mother**, I represent life. That is my domain." The Interrogator could see the history of the Humans in her eyes as she spoke "I have been the lone member of the Human Pantheon since they discovered the ability to travel faster than light. I was the first, and I am the last"

"Before they even left my cradle, my children had perfected the art of war, they invented and turned terrible weapons on themselves. My children are wild, they seek freedom above all else and would not be bound. They destroyed the budding Deities that would have come to rule them. My children would have destroyed themselves if I had not spoken to them. I granted them the ability to travel faster than light, and begged them to go out among the stars and live."

The Interrogator could see the deaths of the Primordial Human Deities as the humans turned terrible weapons upon them and rent them asunder. He could see this Gaia kneeling and pleading before the leaders of humanity to not destroy themselves.

Gaia turned away from the Interrogator as tears welled up in her eyes. "I am not like your Pantheon" She said, wiping her eyes and turning back to meet his gaze "I do not directly interfere with my children's souls. But then, even referring to them as my children marks me as different from your gods doesn't it?" The Interrogator gritted his teeth, this was true, the Pantheon of Zzyth considered the Zzyth useful tools, perhaps valuable servants to the more kindly. As far as the Interrogator knew, none of the Zzyth Pantheon took a paternal role for his species. It was an honor to be of use to the Pantheon, the souls of the most valuable servants were taken and used to enhance the next generation of Zzyth. The Interrogator's own enhanced soul was taken from one of these exalted ones.

"As I said, my domain is life and the natural world" Gaia continued "I cannot grant the same gifts that your Pantheon grants of power in war." Gaia turned and began to walk away from The Interrogator as the vines began to constrict around him. "I have instead granted each and every one of my children a seed of my power. This seed makes their soul immutable to all outside influence, and grants them *potential*."

The way Gaia said that last word made it echo in The Interrogator's mind much like Gaia's name had when she spoke it.

"My children can adapt to any situation, changing and manipulating their own souls to grant themselves power. Often, like so many other things, they have turned this ability upon themselves. But your gods have given them a threat against which they can unite." Gaia wrapped her arms around herself in a posture that spoke of great fear "I have glimpsed their potential." She turned back to the Interrogator, sadness etched into her face. "I knew this potential when I first granted them this gift, and now you have unleashed it upon yourselves." The vines grew tighter, now tearing into his soul, ripping him open, pulling pieces of it off. "Take comfort" Gaia said as darkness overtook Juka, the interrogator. "Your species will not be utterly destroyed, but your Pantheon will not survive the wrath of my children."